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Noted Economist Describes Factors Favoring Small Town Business Life

GOOD ROADS, INDUSTRIES AND MODERN MERCHANDISING ARE BETTERING ALL COMMUNITIES

This is the continuation of a report of a nation-wide radio address made recently by Dr. Julius Klein, assistant secretary of commerce, in which the noted economist treats of "Factors Favoring Small Town Business." Last week the report of Dr. Klein's talk pointed out the business future of the small town and the elements with which local merchants have to contend in regard to out-of-town buying—and the reasons for such "foreign" purchasing—criticisms of home-town stores as compared with the large city mercantile establishments and what the local merchants might do to counteract outside buying.

A vital social and economic change in the business atmosphere of the small town—and Torrance is a good example of this—is due chiefly to amazing advances in transportation which have banished almost wholly the isolation of the small communities. Dr. Julius Klein said:

"Better railroads and waterways have been potent factors, but probably the greatest of all forces has been the building of surfaced roads, increasing in the country as a whole from 153,000 miles to nearly 700,000 in the last 25 years—and these roads are traversed by over more than 25 million automobiles and buses.

Effect of Good Roads "What has been the effect of good roads upon the business life of the small town?" the speaker questioned. "Let me give you first an example that bears upon the domestic life as well. In 1910, about 90 per cent of the bread consumed in this country was baked by housewives in the home; today the proportion is exactly reversed, four-fifths of the bread being now produced in bakeries. Good roads and streets and motor transport by commercial bakeries, especially to suburban regions or putting towns, have been a major factor in bringing about this dramatic change in our household economy.

"Nobody can deny," the speaker continued, "that the good roads situation is a necessity, to diminish small town business. They have made it easy to go elsewhere to do shopping—as I tried to show in my talk a week ago. (Reported in last week's Herald.) But roads have also helped the small town storekeeper—that is, the situation of the small town storekeeper is being facilitated by the good roads. He can keep a fresher and smaller stock—can enjoy the savings of quicker turnovers—and can therefore cope with the swift 'style cycle' much more readily than in the past.

A Torrance Opportunity It might be mentioned in connection with this favorable element of good roads, Torrance merchants have an opportunity—and many of them are embracing it—of reaching out the scope of their services to the trading area about this community, an area that is richly served with 30,000 people. To reach this adjoining area, consistent, well-planned advertising is the key which unlocks this rich field. To that end, the Torrance Herald increases its regular circulation twice a month to 8000 direct contacts with outlying but contiguous territory with the publication of a "Shopping News."

But to continue Dr. Klein's expert analysis of small town business, the radio speaker declared: "Here is another helpful factor. The new move toward decentralization of industry means much to the business future of the small town. Factories in America have tended, in the past, to concentrate in the cities. Why? Because the power was there chiefly—the cheapest, most convenient power—and it could not be moved. But now the new technique of long distance transmission of electric power is drastically changing that condition. Power can be brought to the smallest village—easily, cheaply, if the local advantages warrant.

Decentralization of Industry Factories, industries—that is, the foundation upon which Torrance was built and the material for this community's future expansion. Dr. Klein, although he did not know it, tells the story of Torrance as authoritatively as it has been written.

"That fact (accessibility to power) is beginning to reverse the industrial movement. Industry is decentralizing. Factories are coming to the smaller places. Land is vastly cheaper there. Rents are lower. Building costs are less. The labor is usually satisfactory. Tax rates are much more moderate. It does not cost so much to live. Congestion, with its train of ill-effects, is practically absent.

Then the Washington speaker recited a few illustrations of small town prospects—instances of great expansion in little cities because of the introduction of industries in their corporate limits.

Radio Entertainment Aids

In regard to the advantage of the radio to small town business men, Dr. Klein stated: "Radio supplying an endless variety of entertainment for the home—and for the store as well—tends to counteract the lure of city amusements. It keeps people closer to their own hearth-stones and to their home-town merchants or neighboring shops. And when television comes, in full power and perfection—as it surely will come in the very near future—this stay-at-home influence will be enhanced and intensified immeasurably. Small town business will inevitably benefit from such a striking transformation and forward step as this.

"Let us take a brief look now at one of the liveliest and most contentious questions that bear upon small town business: Namely, 'Can the chain store successfully invade the small town?' Certainly a vital problem—this one of the survival of the independent, who, as President Hoover has put it, is 'the foundation of American business.'

Chains Vs. Independents

"I just want to mention a few of the things that influence the situation," the assistant secretary of commerce continues. "A chain store in a small town lacks some of the characteristics that help to 'make the wheels go round' in a typical chain-store activity. In the nature of things it cannot have so much 'large scale' requisition, distribution, accounting and other city chain-store advantages. Probably that is why our census figures show that, in towns of less than 10,000 population, the chains do less than 10 per cent of the total business. To increase that, they are up against one of the great assets of the small town independent, namely, personal relations and special service.

"Take the credit question. The independent merchant can take advantage of the fact that it is probably as safe to extend open credit in the American small town as it is anywhere on earth. He runs across very few cases like the one in which an exasperated merchant, desperate over a bill long due, accosted the debtor with these words: 'Look here, John, you've been owing me this bill for a year. Now I'll meet you half way. I'm ready to forget half what you owe.' And John came right back with: 'Fine! I'll meet you. I'll forget the other half!'

Mail Order Business

A pretty weighty factor in determining the flow of business in a small town is that of personal friendship. Dr. Klein commented: "The local people go to the same churches, belong to the same lodges, know the same people. The independent small town merchant knows the typical wants and proclivities, even the dispositions of his townspeople. He would never make such a blunder as Dr. Klein described of an old-rag man who approached a sharp-shinned housewife with the query: 'Any old bottles, ma'am—any old gin or whisky bottles?' Thoroughly outraged, the woman snapped: 'Do

I look as if I drank gin or whisky?' The questioner peered at her more closely and hastened to exclaim: 'My mistake—my mistake, lady. Any vinegar bottles?' Dr. Klein touched on mail order trade, saying: "Our experts at the Department of Commerce say that, from their experience, it looks as if the mail order houses get a much larger business from the farmers, in proportion to the number of people than they do from the actual residents of small towns."

Of course, here in Los Angeles county, the mail order business is almost confined to direct purchases made at the branch department stores operated by two of the largest mail order firms in the country and this is figured in with local business that goes to the larger cities.

"New Age" in Small Towns In conclusion, Dr. Klein gives this optimistic note for the small community merchants: "And so, although there are unfavorable factors against small-town business, there are, on the other hand, strong, favorable elements which are more modern, more in the spirit of the 'new age' than are the adverse circumstances. A business friend of mine who lives in Dallas, Texas, and who is a director of a great wholesale house operating all over the country, writes me: 'I have been convinced—not through guesswork, but by actual experience—that there is a comeback in the small town. There are many good reasons for it, but the most outstanding is more efficient storekeeping.' "Small town industry and business in this country are justified in entertaining a lively hopefulness and sturdy courage."

REFRIGERATED RIDE

By the United Press

ROSELLE. — Arnold Smith found Reno so crowded he sought a refrigerator car and went to sleep. While he slumbered the car was sealed and started on its trip. Four days later he was taken out here, weak from lack of food and water.

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ANOTHER AL CAPONE

By the United Press

VALLEJO.—"Al Capone II" is the name of a small black and white billiard presented to the U. S. S. Chicago as a mascot. He replaces a former Al Capone who caught pneumonia at sea and died. He was buried with full military honors.

ALGY, NEW STYLE

By the United Press

REDDING—Losing the trail to Deerheart lake, Brad Pfeiffer started to scout around. Instead of locating the trail, he soon found himself facing a big brown bear. "The bear went one way and I went the other," Pfeiffer said.

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"I tasted some good meat back in Minnesota and the Dakotas, but nothing quite so good as we have in California, and their prices are a little higher back there too. I'm for California and TORRANCE."

Sincerely,

HENRY GRUBBS, Proprietor.

SUPREME MARKET

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